



# GOAL-SETTING POLICY FOR VIRGINIA ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

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### KEY ICONS USED IN THIS MANUAL



**GOAL-SETTING POLICY**



**GOAL-SETTING REPORTING POLICY**



## I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## A. NEED FOR GOAL-SETTING POLICY

The goal-setting policies in this document are designed as a guide for adult education programs in Virginia. They provide a detailed explanation of the state and local program responsibilities for goal setting specific to the National Reporting System (NRS) and state requirements. These policies should guide the processes that programs apply when reporting learner goals in compliance with NRS requirements.



### Policy 1.1

**Programs must adhere to the goal-setting policies identified to ensure that learners select reasonable and attainable goals that satisfy NRS and state reporting requirements.**

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All learners who seek services from local programs have goals for attending. In some cases, those goals are very specific; in others, they may be very general. Learners may have difficulty accurately identifying the goals that are influencing their decision to participate. Additionally, attainment of the goal may take a matter of weeks, several months, or more than a year. Goals take many forms, both short term and long term. Goal setting according to sound policy is necessary for two primary reasons: to identify areas of focus for learners and instructional staff; and to establish benchmarks against which learner progress may be measured.

#### IDENTIFYING AREAS OF FOCUS

Providing focus at all levels and stages of the program is critical. Learners must be able to demonstrate educational gains and make progress towards completion of NRS, state, and personal goals. Instructional staff need focus to direct activities and guide instruction so that learners will have opportunities to demonstrate educational gains and complete goals. Finally, program managers require focus for planning and developing programs that ultimately reach the needs of learners and staff.

#### BENCHMARKING INDIVIDUAL AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

By establishing goals early in the educational process, the learner and the program have an increased opportunity to demonstrate performance. Learners and staff are able to demonstrate progress by interviewing, documenting goals with specific steps, and establishing benchmarks along a time line. This progress also serves as a motivator toward the ultimate step of completing the goal. By identifying specific, attainable steps, the learner, in particular, is able to see a present level and identify what effort is required to complete the goal.

## B. PURPOSES OF GOAL SETTING

#### LEARNER FOCUS AND DIRECTION

Each learner arrives at the program with a different set of goals. Through goal-setting processes, local programs are better able to focus the learner in a specific direction. This direction may progress from reaching short-term goals, to accomplishing a significant, long-term goal, such as completing the GED or entering post-secondary education and training.

Goal setting also helps identify personal goals that may contribute to the completion of program reporting goals.

#### STAFF FOCUS AND DIRECTION

Whether an instructor is working with a group of twenty students or a tutor has one student, each staff member needs to understand what the motivation is for every learner who is participating. Goal setting enables staff to better plan and develop instructional programs that meet the needs of learners in completing their goals. In situations where multiple learners share a common goal, staff are better informed to develop instructional strategies and activities to include multiple learners. While goal setting is individualized, specific steps to goal completion may be accomplished together with other learners.

#### PROGRAM FOCUS AND DIRECTION

Program managers and directors must understand what the goals are for learners participating and the consequent needs of staff working with learners. The goal-setting process provides key information that program managers and directors should use to plan programs. Forming partnerships or collaborating with other service providers may be the result of specific goals identified by a majority of learners. Additionally, planning for materials and resources can be improved when learner goals are clear.

#### DEMONSTRATED RESULTS

Goal setting is a quantitative and observable way for learners and individuals to see the results of the instructional process and the work that has been completed. By documenting measurable and discrete steps, programs can more easily demonstrate their positive results.

### **C. SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW**

Goal setting is an interactive process between the learner and staff. While the goals must be realistic and attainable, the process provides an opportunity for learners to identify their motivations for attending. Setting goals should be viewed as a compliment to the instructional process, guiding decisions and informing program planning. Planned reviews and revisions are part of the dynamic process of setting goals. By establishing time lines and checkpoints for goal completion, learners and staff will be more motivated, and enhanced participation will be more likely. Goal completion can be enhanced, especially for learners with disabilities, through collaboration with other service providers. Documenting the process allows the learner to see what he or she has completed and what remains to be accomplished.



## II. GENERAL GOAL-SETTING REQUIREMENTS



## A. SETTING GOALS



### Policy 2.1

**Programs must provide a goal-setting process that includes completion of a student-learning plan (SLP) within the first six hours of instruction for all learners reported into the NRS Web-based data system.**

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The goal-setting process involves learners and staff at all levels of the program. Goal setting is an active and dynamic process. It requires an initial setting stage and periodic review, when completed steps are identified and revisions may be made. A quality or “SMART” goal has the following five characteristics.

- **Specific** – The goal has a primary focus and direction for the learner.
- **Measurable** – The goal is established with quantitative components that identify when it has been achieved.
- **Attainable** – The learner is able to achieve the goal at a set point in time.
- **Reasonable** – The goal requires the learner to expand his/her abilities but does not cause the learner to become frustrated or discouraged.
- **Time-specific** – The goal sets a target date(s) for completion. Establishing a time line is recommended.

#### STUDENT-LEARNING PLAN (SLP)

The SLP provides an opportunity for the learner and staff to periodically discuss, identify, and review the goals for attending. As part of the intake form and process, it represents a permanent record of the learner’s motivations for attending. The learner should have access to the plan and be responsible for indicating to staff when goals are completed or when revisions are necessary.



### Policy 2.2

**Programs must review the SLP after every 30 hours of instruction, making revisions as appropriate. Any revisions that affect NRS or state reporting must be identified in the NRS Web-based data system.**

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## B. GOAL TYPES

Learners may identify three goal types. The goal types include NRS, state, and personal. The NRS Web-based data system requires direct reporting of NRS and state goals; however, the data system does not report a learner’s personal goal(s). Each type of goal is the result of the learner’s needs or priorities for program participation.

#### NRS GOALS

The accountability structure required by the *Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)*, defines NRS goals. Two categories of NRS goals are identified: primary and secondary. Primary goals represent the standard goals

necessary for local program reporting on the required NRS measures and identified on specific tables of performance. Of the five primary goals, four of them are classified as follow-up goals (FG) requiring a data match to an external data system to identify goal completion at a future time. Secondary goals represent additional accountability standards for reporting, but they remain optional.

*Primary* – The five primary goals include:

- increase educational functioning level\*;
- enter employment (FG);
- retain employment (FG);
- enter post-secondary education or training (FG); and
- obtain a secondary school diploma (EDP credential, H.S. Diploma) or GED (FG).

*Secondary* – The two secondary goals include:

- increase involvement in child's education; and
- increase involvement in child's literacy activities.

*\* Every learner each fiscal year must set the goal to increase educational functioning level.*

### STATE GOALS

Virginia identifies two state goals. These goals represent state initiatives and priorities, but they remain optional for reporting. Learners who express a desire to complete state goals may set them. State goals do not require a data match. The two goals include:

- obtain Career Readiness Certificate (CRC); and
- obtain citizenship.

### PERSONAL GOALS

Learners may identify wide-ranging personal goals for attending the program. These goals may be related to work, family, personal fulfillment, or other areas. Personal learner goals often are part of or contribute to the NRS and state goals. Personal goals are probably the most powerful motivator for learners, and they are a critical part of the goal-setting process.

### SHORT-TERM VS. LONG-TERM GOALS

The time it takes to complete each goal type will vary from one learner to another. Both short-term and long-term goals are likely to be identified, depending on the learner's functioning level and abilities. In general, a short-term goal is any goal that may be completed in less than six months from the date the goal is set. A long-term goal is any goal that may be completed in six months or more from the date the goal is set. Establishing target dates provides an opportunity to identify whether a goal is short-term or long-term.

## C. TRAINING FOR GOAL SETTING

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### Policy 2.3

**All program staff who participate in learner goal-setting processes must successfully complete training on the VDOE goal-setting policy annually.**

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The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) coordinates OAEL-approved training for staff. Schedules of goal-setting trainings are available at the beginning of each fiscal year. Local program staff may participate in training activities most often without charge. Online training opportunities, when applicable, are available.

#### NEW STAFF

Staff new to adult education programs and learner goal setting may not have experience reviewing, planning, and setting goals with learners, particularly NRS and state goals. Consequently, new staff must successfully complete the goal-setting training prior to any learner goal setting.

#### CONTINUING STAFF

Continuing adult education staff must re-certify on the goal-setting policy every two years. Re-certification occurs through an online, refresher mini-course.

## D. ACCOMMODATING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES OR OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

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### Policy 2.4

**Learners with professionally certified documentation who self-identify a given physical, mental, or emotional disability must be provided appropriate accommodations for completing goals.**

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Adults with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities may not be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through traditional approaches. Adults with professionally certified documentation identifying disabilities should receive accommodations based on their disabilities. Providing accommodations to adults with documented disabilities will result in a more accurate demonstration of their abilities to complete goals.

If a learner self-identifies a disability, it is the responsibility of the local program to provide reasonable accommodations. Local programs may not deny or prevent access to services based on a learner's disability. The local program may be required to absorb the costs related to the accommodation(s). By not providing appropriate accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities, programs could find themselves in violation of federal law.

#### DOCUMENTING ACCOMMODATIONS

As part of the learner's goal setting and educational plan, required accommodations should be identified when appropriate. This information assists the instructional staff and counselors with adapting lessons and materials for successful assignment and goal completion.

COLLABORATING WITH EXISTING SERVICES

The value of partnerships becomes especially important when providing services to learners with documented disabilities. To assist the disabled learner in completing goals, local programs should coordinate and develop partnerships with existing service providers to provide accommodations for goal completion. Service providers such as the Department of Social Services, Department of Rehabilitative Services, or the Department of the Blind and Visually Impaired are available to assist adults with disabilities who have employment-related goals. Service providers may also support the learner financially by assisting with costs associated with taking the GED Tests or applying for grant monies to attend post-secondary education and training.



### III. GUIDELINES FOR GOAL SETTING

## A. GENERAL OVERVIEW

As described previously, goal setting establishes a path for student success related to program participation. It may inform instructional practices and program planning. A critical component to goal setting is recognizing if a goal is attainable during the fiscal year or at a future time. Accurate goal setting and reporting are critical to demonstrate student, program, and, ultimately, state success in meeting performance targets related to NRS goals and state goals.

## B. GOAL-SETTING REPORTING

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### Policy 3.1

**Programs must report goals (NRS or State) at the time during the fiscal year when the goals are established. All goals set must be attainable during the fiscal year.**

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Learner goals must be identified in the Web-based data system at the time the goals are set. Local programs and the state must be able to identify the needs of learners and be responsive to those needs. Setting goals and reporting them in a timely manner provides an opportunity to track learners and respond to learner needs appropriately.



### Policy 3.2

**Programs must report goal completion (NRS or State) at the time during the reported fiscal year when the goal is completed.**

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Decisions about program services should be informed based on the types of goals established by learners and their ability to complete the goals. Additionally, the dates of goal completion specifically affect the quality of the data-matching ability of the state. Goal completion is time-sensitive, and local programs need to be as accurate as possible in identifying the date of completion. All completion dates should be indicated on the intake form and accompanying SLP.

### EXIT DATES

Exit dates play a critical role in the ability of the state to match completed NRS goals for follow-up purposes. When learners complete an identified NRS goal and no longer attend a program during the fiscal year, an exit date must be assigned to each learner. Only those students assigned an exit date with a valid goal set and met will be included for follow-up reporting.

### LOCAL FOLLOW UP

Local programs must follow up with learners who exit programs without completing goals and report those follow-up activities. The intake form and accompanying SLP provide local programs with a place to report attempts to follow up with students.



### Policy 3.3

**Programs must follow up with learners within 30 days after program exit to identify goal completion.**

Follow-up activities may include, but are not limited to, telephone calls, e-mail, post card, and local surveys. Local follow up is an important means to reconnect with learners so that they may potentially complete goals. The value of follow-up activities should not be overlooked as a valuable part of the goal-setting process.

#### STATE FOLLOW UP

At the state level, follow up is conducted through a data match with other Virginia state administrative agencies. The results of the state data match are reported on NRS Tables 5, 8, 9, and 10, for each funded program in late November or December annually.

## C. GOAL-SETTING REVIEW



### Policy 3.4

**Programs must review quarterly the completeness and accuracy of all NRS and state goals reported into the NRS Web-based data system.**

There are three primary reasons for regular review of the goals that are set: accuracy, appropriateness, and retention. The learner and the program require focus and direction to improve performance for both. The data system allows for the exporting of NRS and state goals for review of individual learners. This is also an opportunity to review and monitor program performance for decision making. NRS Tables 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 all indicate the results of program performance and are available throughout the year.

#### ACCURACY

In many programs, more than one individual enters data into the Web-based system. Potential data errors are more likely when more than one person is responsible for entering data. A regular review of data identifies potential errors and is more likely to ensure that goals have been set and met for learner and program credit.

#### APPROPRIATENESS

Learners should not set goals that are unrealistic or unattainable. For example, a limited-English proficient learner who reads and writes English at the beginning literacy level is very unlikely to pass the GED Tests in the first year of attendance. A similar example would be a learner who is in a corrections program for two years but wants to set a goal of entering employment. In both examples, the learners could identify these as long-term goals, but neither goal could be attained during the fiscal year. A review of goals is critical to determine the appropriateness of the data entered for reporting.

#### RETENTION

Learner retention is directly affected by the ability to complete goals. A regular review of goals provides an opportunity to connect with learners, as well as to adjust class or program



focus if goals are not being met. It also provides the program an opportunity to reinforce learner motivations for program attendance.

## IV. APPENDIX

## **POLICIES SUMMARY**

### **1.1 ADHERENCE TO POLICIES (P.4)**

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Programs must adhere to the goal-setting policies identified to ensure that learners select reasonable and attainable goals that satisfy NRS and state reporting requirements.

### **2.1 SETTING GOALS (P. 8)**

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Programs must provide a goal-setting process that includes completion of a student-learning plan (SLP) within the first six hours of instruction for all learners reported into the NRS Web-based data system.

### **2.2 SETTING GOALS (P. 8)**

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Programs must review the SLP after every 30 hours of instruction, making revisions as appropriate. Any revisions that affect NRS or state reporting must be identified in the NRS Web-based data system.

### **2.3 TRAINING FOR GOAL SETTING (P. 10)**

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All program staff that participate in learner goal-setting processes must successfully complete training on the VDOE goal-setting policy annually.

### **2.4 ACCOMMODATING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES OR OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS (P. 10)**

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Learners with professionally certified documentation who self-identify a given physical, mental, or emotional disability must be provided appropriate accommodations for completing goals.

### **3.1 GOAL-SETTING REPORTING (P. 14)**

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Programs must report goals (NRS or State) at the time during the fiscal year when the goals are established. All goals set must be attainable during the reported fiscal year.

### **3.2 GOAL-SETTING REPORTING (P. 14)**

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Programs must report goal completion (NRS or State) at the time during the reported fiscal year when the goal is completed.

### **3.3 GOAL-SETTING REPORTING (P. 15)**

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Programs must follow up with learners within 30 days after exit to identify goal completion.

### **3.4 GOAL-SETTING REVIEW (P. 15)**

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Programs must review quarterly the completeness and accuracy of all NRS and state goals reported into the NRS Web-based data system.



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